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AUTHOR Daiker, Donald A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that it is possible to construct a course that integrates the teaching of composition with the teaching of literature without allowing the secondary goal of heightened literary understanding to overwhelm the primary goal of improved expository writing. It presents a syllabus for a four-week unit on Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises" that includes equal numbers of writing and reading assignments. The paper then argues that increasing the number of writing assignments and decreasing the number of reading assignments does not necessarily mean less study of literature but may permit an even greater appreciation for literature because understanding is increased. It also points out that increased writing assignments do not necessarily mean an increased grading load, pointing out that many writing assignments need be graded only enough to persuade students that the assignments have been checked over. (TJ)

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Integrating Composition and Literature: Some Practical Suggestions

Donald A. Daiker

At Miami University and at other schools there is a course required of all second-semester freshmen that announces its primary goal as instruction in composition and its secondary goal as instruction in literature. But at Miami University--and I suspect elsewhere--the secondary goal of literary instruction consistently overwhelms the primary goal of writing instruction. Students, of course, recognize this fact--a recent Miami survey showed that 56 percent of them believe that, whatever other value the course had, it did not help improve their writing skills. It's even likely that most of us who teach such a course recognize that we're not really teaching writing. After all, our syllabus typically includes five or six reading assignments for every writing assignment. And, during class, discussion focuses five or six times more frequently on a line from Dickinson or Yeats than on a sentence from a student paper. If we've grown comfortable with such imbalance, it may be because both students and teachers find fiction and poetry so much more interesting and rewarding than those god-awful expository essays from the first term. The literature may be equally irrelevant to teaching writing but at least it's engaging.

But now that essay readers are being tossed out of first-term composition courses with increasing frequency--a healthy sign that the profession is starting to care about the teaching of writing--there is a related movement to eliminate literature from the second term. Proponents of such a movement fiercely proclaim that they are not against literature, just for composition. Their central argument is that in the hands of teachers trained as literary critics a composition course which includes literature invariably becomes one that is dominated by literature. It is an argument supported by history and even by common sense: since we tend to teach whatever we teach best and since most of us teach literature more effectively than writing, courses in "Composition and Literature" have a way of becoming "Literature with a Little Composition on the Side."

But my central argument is that a composition course which excludes literature is not the only alternative to a composition course dominated by literature. It is possible to construct a course which carefully integrates the teaching of composition with the teaching of literature so that the secondary goal of heightened literary understanding does not overwhelm the primary goal of improved expository writing. Within such an integrated course, a four-week unit on the novel--with The Sun Also Rises

as the novel selection--might be organized in ways suggested by the partial syllabus below.

Integrating Composition and Literature:

Syllabus for a Four-Week Unit on The Sun Also Rises

1. The Sun Also Rises, 1-65 (through Book I).

2. Paragraph #1: a thesis-support paragraph of approximately 150 words on any one of these three topics:

   A. Show that in the first two chapters of The Sun Also Rises Hemingway characterizes Robert Cohn as a person who does not control his own life but is controlled by others.

   B. Show that Jake Barnes is not telling the full truth when he says that he never thinks about his war wound (p.26).

   C. Show that Georgette is not a happy hooker.

3. The Sun Also Rises, 69-151.

4. Exercise #1: a thesis-support paragraph. See the attached exercise #1.

5. Read and evaluate excerpts from Paper #3 (the last short story paper). Come to class able to point out three instances of student writing that is effective and three instances of student writing that needs improving.

6. Paper #1: a thesis-support essay of 500-600 words on one of the following topics or on any other topic for which you receive permission:

   A. Show that Jake gets his money's worth of enjoyment from his stay at Burguete.

   B. Show that Jake really tries, as he says, "not [to] make trouble for people" (p. 31).

   C. Show that Harvey Stone is right when he labels Robert Cohn a "case of arrested development" (p. 44).

   D. Show that Jake is accurate in describing himself as a "rotten Catholic" (p. 97).

   E. Show that Robert Cohn has "a wonderful quality of bringing out the worst in anybody" (p. 98).

F. Show that Jake Barnes often relies on humor, irony, and understatement as means of self-defense.

7. The Sun Also Rises, 152-224 (through Book II).

8. Paragraph #2: an argument paragraph of approximately 150 words which refutes any one of the following three positions:

A. By the end of Book II of The Sun Also Rises, the reader has come to see that Robert Cohn is the real hero of the novel. Cohn is the true friend and the true lover. Moreover, Cohn exemplifies Christian decency, humanitarianism, gentlemanly conduct, and thoughtfulness for others. In contrast to Cohn, Jake, Brett, and the rest of their crowd emerge as confused, unprinicipled, selfish, and childish. It is strength, not weakness, that makes Cohn different from the others.

B. Book II shows, as Robert Cohn has suspected all along, that bull-fighting is "an abnormal life" (p. 10). Indeed, Hemingway wants the reader to understand that bull-fighting is mere entertainment, nothing more than an escape from the problems and tensions of reality. Only failures in the game of life turn to the game of bull-fighting.

C. The first two books of The Sun Also Rises reveal that the relationship between Jake and Brett is a growing, developing, and maturing relationship. Almost day by day Brett and Jake gain new insights into each other and so treat each other with increased care, consideration, and love. Especially the end of Book II makes clear that the relationship between Jake and Brett has reached new heights of understanding and fulfillment.

9. The Sun Also Rises, 227-247 (to the end).

10. Exercise #2: an argumentative paragraph. See the attached exercise #2.

11. Read and evaluate excerpts from Paper #3 (the thesis-support paper on The Sun Also Rises). Come to class with three instances of student writing that is effective and three instances of student writing that needs improving.

12. Paper #2: an argument essay of approximately 700-800 words that begins by assuming the reader holds one of the six positions defined below and then proceeds by refuting that position and establishing another.

A. The Sun Also Rises presents motion which goes no place. At the end of the novel, Jake and Brett (as well as Bill, Cohn, Mike and even Romero) are right back where they started from. Not a single character has learned anything

from experience that enables him or her to lead a more rewarding live. As the novel's epigraph from Ecclesiastes suggests, the action of The Sun Also Rises goes around in circles and gets nowhere. It is a novel of stasis, despair, and futility.

B. Lady Brett Ashley emerges as the most virtuous and sympathetic character in The Sun Also Rises. It is Brett who ends the affair with Romero, and she does so for the best of reasons: she does not want to corrupt him. (Unlike the American tourists Brett fully recognizes Romero's value). But Brett's rejection of Romero is but one of many examples of her high standards, of her decency and honor. Above all, Brett is always completely honest with herself and with others. At the end of the novel we find Brett fully in control of herself and her life.

C. Although Jake Barnes claims midway through The Sun Also Rises that "the world is a good place to buy in," the rest of the novel demonstrates otherwise. Indeed, nobody gets their money's worth of enjoyment from life. Mike, Cohn, and Jake have each been jilted by Brett, who in turn has been abandoned by Romero, for whom Brett proved a mojor disappointment. Throughout the novel the characters pay and pay--for hotel rooms, drinks, shoe shines, stuffed dogs, bullfight tickets, wine, cab rides, and everything else--but in the long run everyone gets jipped.

D. Bill Gorton represents the ideal in The Sun Also Rises, the kind of person that Jake Barnes might have become had he not been injured in the war. Bill serves as Jake's guide and model throughout the book but, unfortunately, Jake cannot live up to Bill's high standards. Although Bill encourages Jake to free himself from Brett, Jake cannot do so. Although Bill presses Jake to return to Paris, Jake foolishly journeys on to see Brett in Madrid. It is precisely because Jake fails to learn the lessons Bill tries to teach him that Jake ends the novel in frustration and despair.

E. The ending of The Sun Also Rises is quietly but deeply affirmative. From Pedro Romero, Jake Barnes has learned how to control and dominate Brett, and he treats Brett in Book III of the novel in the same way that Romero handles the bull in the ring. No longer a defenseless steer, Jake has become the bull-fighter who "lives his life all the way up" (10). As Jake's eating a big meal at one of the world's finest reataurants indicates, he has finally learned how to get his money's worth out of life.

F. In the first half of The Sun Also Rises, Jake Barnes

escapes from the nightmares of Paris to Burguete and fishing on the Irati River with Bill Gorton. In the second half of the book, Jake retreats from the nightmares of Pamplona to relax in San Sebastian and to swim in the bay. The point is this: Jake's motions always repeat themselves. Going to San Sebastian is the exact equivalent of the earlier move to Burguete. Both places are vacation areas, resorts where there is little or no pressure. In each spot Jake temporarily reorders his life and gets his money's worth of pleasure. But each time he must return to Brett and to defeat.

The Sun Also Rises: Exercise #1

Using the sentences below, write a single paragraph of approximately 150 words which shows that Jake's experiences at Burguete and the Irati River are really an escape or retreat from the conflicts of the real world. Use only the sentences below that help you develop that idea. Feel free to change the wording and phrasing and to add facts of your own. In any case, you will need to change the order of the information below.

1. Brett is not in Burguete.
2. Cohn and Mike are not in Burguete.
3. Except for the woman innkeeper, there seem to be no women in Burguete.
4. As Jake says, "There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike" (p. 125).
5. When Jake looks out the window of the inn, he sees an "old diligence" (112).
6. A diligence is a stage coach.
7. According to Jake, the stage coach is left over from the days before buses.
8. Jake and Bill see cattle.
9. Jake and Bill do not see bulls.
10. Jake and Bill easily catch trout in the Irati River.
11. Jake catches his first trout soon after he puts his line in the water.
12. Jake catches six more trout soon after.
13. Paris is hot.
14. At Burguete, "there was always a breeze even in the heat of the day" (p. 125).
15. Jake and Bill play "three-handed bridge" with an Englishman named Harris.
16. Harris says, "Wonderful how one loses track of the days up here in the mountains" (127).
17. On the way to Burguete Jake and Bill see "the monastery of Roncesvalles" (108).
18. Later, Jake, Bill, and Harris go through the monastery.
19. There are no side-streets in Burguete.
20. The innkeeper at Burguete wears glasses.
21. Jake has trouble sleeping in Paris.
22. Jake has no trouble sleeping in Burguete.

23. After fishing, Jake reads a "wonderful story" by A.E.W. Mason (120).
24. The story is about a man who had been frozen in the Alps and then fallen into a glacier and disappeared.
25. The man's bride intends to wait exactly 24 years for his body to come out.
26. The newspaper that Jake reads is one-week old.

The Sun Also Rises: Exercise #2

Combine the following sentences into an argument paragraph (approximately 150 words) that supports one of the following assertions and refutes the other:

1. The second cab ride of Brett and Jake in The Sun Also Rises duplicates the first cab ride.
2. The second cab ride of Brett and Jake in The Sun Also Rises contrasts with the first.

Feel free to add or omit facts and details of your own.

1. In The Sun Also Rises Jake takes two cab rides with Brett.
2. The first ride occurs in Book I (pp. 24-28).
3. It takes place in Paris.
4. The second ride occurs in Book III (p. 247).
5. It takes place in Madrid.
6. Some people think the second ride is like the first.
7. These people tend to think that the relationship between Jake and Brett at the end of the story is like their relationship at the beginning.
8. Some people think the second ride is a reversal of the first.
9. These people tend to think that the relationship between Brett and Jake has changed.
10. The first ride takes place at night.
11. The second ride takes place during the day.
12. The first ride is suggested by Brett.
13. The second ride is initiated by Jake.
14. For the first ride, Jake asks Brett where they should go.
15. For the second ride, Jake selects the destination himself.
16. Jake stares at Brett during the first ride.
17. Jake does not stare at Brett during the second ride.
18. Jake is tense during the first ride.
19. Jake is not tense during the second ride; he is comfortable.
20. The first ride ends with Jake's kissing Brett.
21. The second ride ends with Jake's saying, "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

The sample syllabus for The Sun Also Rises includes several strategies for integrating composition with literature. Most simple and most basic is the balancing of reading and writing assignments. That is, for every homework assignment that requires students to read, the syllabus includes one requiring them to write. Yet the balancing of reading and writing assignments does not necessarily mean any dramatic increase in the instructor's

grading time or any increase at all in the number of formal, graded papers. The syllabus suggests that each formal paper be punctuated by two shorter writing assignments, perhaps one an exercise in paragraph construction and the other in sentence combining. Such exercises not only give students needed writing practice, but, specially constructed for the purpose, help prepare them for the next formal assignment. For example, paragraph 1 and exercise 1 prepare students for the first novel paper by providing practice in supporting a thesis with evidence and illustration. In the same way, students work toward the second formal paper--an argument-- by constructing argument paragraphs for paragraph 2 and exercise 2. But shorter exercises can be constructed to help students solve any composition problem: working quotations from the text into sentences of their own, organizing comparison-and-contrast paragraphs, or using repetition to achieve emphasis and coherence. Whatever its purposes, the shorter exercise should not be carefully graded; usually it should not be graded at all. So long as composition teachers continue to believe that they must conscientiously mark every piece of writing they assign, students will never do enough writing. Exercises need only as much grading as motivates the students to keep writing. One of my colleagues collects them at five or six unannounced times during the term; my own students submit all their paragraphs and exercises on four dates that I specify on the first day of class. We spend just enough time checking over the exercises as will persuade our students that we have checked them over.

A course integrating composition with literature balances not only out-of-class assignments but in-class activity as well: it alternates discussions of literary works with evaluations of student writing. Since students complete a writing assignment every second class, plenty of material is available. The most engaging material will often come from the formal, graded papers since students, like the rest of us, tend to become most involved in what really counts. Accordingly, the syllabus allots one class every two weeks to evaluating excerpts from the most recently submitted papers. Assessing student sentences, paragraphs, and essays not only keeps class discussion focused on student writing --especially on what is worth imitating in student writing--but also creates confidence by clarifying the instructor's criteria for grading. Student writing can again be emphasized whenever an assigned paragraph or exercise is due, such as for syllabus classes 2, 4, 8, and 10. If two or three students are designated to type their versions on a ditto master and turn them in before class, copies can be made and distributed to all students. The versions can then be compared and contrasted, with the instructor directing discussion to whatever seems most important, perhaps to questions of diction and sentence structure, perhaps to larger questions of tone and emphasis.

With both homework assignments and class time equally divided between literature and composition, instructors must obviously limit the number of assigned readings in literature. If they

had previously assigned a short story for each class meeting, they might assign one for every two meetings; if they had previously covered a novel in two weeks, they might now give it four. But since literature is the focus of every writing assignment and since class discussion consistently brings composition to bear upon literature, the study of literature is not necessarily diminished by fewer reading assignments. It may be that students who intensely experience a limited number of literary works gain at least as much understanding and appreciation as those who superficially study a larger number.

The success of an integrated syllabus may depend not only on assigning fewer literary works but on choosing works that are accessible to students.[1] Accessible works are those that students can comprehend--on at least one important level of meaning--without extensive help from their instructor, classmates, or critical aids. With accessibility as a major criterion, we are likely to select Hemingway over Faulkner, Shaw over Beckett, Frost and cummings over Stevens and Eliot. For poetry, the genre students typically find least emotionally and intellectually accessible, a strong choice would be Adrienne Rich, who has written candidly and clearly in prose about her intentions and aspirations, her successes and failures. Read in the light of such clarifying and revealing statements, her poems are more readily understood and appreciated. In a course integrating the teaching of composition with the teaching of literature, there are two major reasons for making poetry, fiction, and drama accessible to the student: first, the already difficult task of writing is not further complicated by requiring students to write about what they do not understand; second, with less time needed for explication and analysis, instructors can more successfully balance class time on literature with class time on composition.

With emphasis removed from explication and analysis, instructors are free to range more widely in making writing assignments. Instead of unraveling the meaning of an especially enigmatic passage or showing the relationship between part of a work and its "theme," students can now be asked to write on simpler questions like those suggested for the second class of the syllabus. Since the purpose of the course is not to produce a host of "New Critics," straight-forward questions about Cohn's submissiveness, Jake's honesty, or Georgette's happiness may be as appropriate as more complex questions of interpretation. No longer obligated to explain the symbolic significance of boxing matches or fishing trips, the instructor gains time to emphasize the humanistic values of literature, to explore with students questions of belief and morality like those suggested in the

[1]See John A. Hart, Robert C. Slack, and Neal Woodruff, Jr., "Literature in the Composition Course," CCC, 9 (Dec.1958), 236-241. This remains the best article on the subject.

syllabus: is Brett really the most virtuous figure in the novel? what does it mean to be a "rotten Catholic"? if Cohn is an adolescent, how is maturity defined? if Jake and Brett are in love, is love a destructive force in human experience? Such questions can be made even more personal: what experiences in your own life have given you your money's worth? which have not? do you really believe that the world is a good place to buy in? do you think that you have to pay in some way for anything that's good? is there anyone or anything that turns you into a steer? do you believe that immoral acts are those which make you disgusted with yourself afterwards?

Whether or not we accept E. D. Hirsch's assertion that "composition is a subject of unrivaled importance at the university,"[2] those of us who teach courses in composition and literature may have a moral obligation to give our students their money's worth of both composition and literature. To do so requires essentially that we construct a syllabus in which reading assignments are balanced against writing assignments and in-class discussions of literature are balanced against in-class evaluations of student writing. To maintain confidence in your new syllabus, remember that anyone capable of explicating "The Force that through the Green Fuse" or of penetrating the ambiguities of "Young Goodman Brown" can easily lead productive and practical discussions of student writing. And to maintain sanity, keep in mind that the decision not to grade every single writing assignment is a highly moral act.

[2] The Philosophy of Composition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 143.